**More than Miserable Comforters (Part 1)**

I have a confession to make. I am a miserable comforter. You can ask Marita. I’m the stereotypical guy who simply wants to fix things. The idea of simply sitting there and listening even after I’m sure I have the solution to whatever is causing the problem is just anathema to me. I want to put the problem on my checklist, provide the simple solution and move on to the next issue at hand. Yep, I’m pretty sorry.

In our God Filled reading plan, we read through **Job** recently and I was struck by some lessons I need to learn to be more than a miserable comforter. According to **Job 16:2**, Job’s friends were among the top 3 of miserable comforters. Let’s see if we can learn from their successes and mistakes.

**Lesson #1**: *Be present*. Yes, I said these guys had some successes. At first, they started on the right path. In **Job 2:11**, the three friends didn’t send Job a message letting him know they were thinking about him and praying for him. They didn’t send a letter saying, “If you need anything, let me know.” They actually went to him. They were present.

**Lesson #2**: *Suffer with them*. You may already know Paul’s exhortation in **Romans 12:15** to weep with those who weep. Look at Job’s three friends when they first arrive and see the suffering of their friend taking this concept to the next level. In **Job 2:12**, when they saw Job “they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven” (ESV). You’d have thought they were the ones in suffering. That is what sympathy is which they said they would offer Job in **Job 2:11**. Their friend was suffering, therefore they were suffering. The suffering often simply need someone to come alongside and mourn with them.

**Lesson #3:** *Be in it for the long haul*. These three friends came from some distance, and **Job 2:13** says “they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him…” (ESV). When we think in our modern terms of being there for someone, one week may not seem like a long haul. Sure, if what we mean is we told them to give us a call if they need something and we checked in on them once via phone during that first week, that isn’t a very long haul. But that isn’t what happened here. They sat on the ground, day and night, for seven days without saying a word. That is long haul support. I can hardly sit for 30 minutes with someone without trying to say something. Good comforting is long haul comforting. For us, that probably won’t mean a week of silence with them in their living room. But it will mean being there with them and for them as long as they need the support.

**Lesson #4**: *Sometimes, silence is best*. As we noted above, these friends sat in silence for seven days. The text says, “for they saw that his suffering was very great” (**Job 2:13**, ESV). The fact is Job was actually doing pretty well facing this suffering until Eliphaz opened his mouth. No doubt, there are times when folks are asking us for advice. But often the best thing we can do for the suffering is to just sit there in silence. No advice. No platitudes. No jokes. No questions. Silence. As hard as this is, it ought to be welcome news for us since in most of these situations we don’t really know what to say anyway. Perhaps you don’t have to figure it out. Perhaps you just need to sit with them silently in their suffering.

**Lesson #5**: *Don’t assume you have all wisdom*. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar made one really huge mistake. They assumed they had all wisdom. Job picked up on that when he rebuked them in **Job 12:2**, saying, “No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you” (ESV).They assumed they knew exactly why someone would be suffering like Job. They assumed they knew exactly what he should do about it. They based their thinking on traditions, dreams, their friends. In fact, when it came to the foundation of their argument, even Job agreed with them. The problem is they were wrong. When you are face to face with the suffering, don’t assume you have all the wisdom. You don’t know everything about their situation or what might resolve their situation. As much as you think you completely understand, whether because of your education, insight, or personal experience, a good dose of humility is required to be a good comforter.

**Lesson #6**: *Simple solutions rarely exist*. It is so easy from the outside to take a sweeping glance at the struggle and suffering someone is going through, diagnose the problem, and dole out a simple solution. “All you need to do is this.” “Why don’t you just do that?” Job’s three friends were full of these platitudes. “Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty” (**Job 5:17**, ESV). “Behold, God will not reject a blameless man, nor take the hand of evildoers” (**Job 8:20**, ESV). “If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, and let not injustice dwell in your tents. Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure and will not fear” (**Job 11:14-15**, ESV). The fact is there was wisdom in what the friends said. The problem is none of their wisdom actually applied to Job’s more complex situation.Beware the simple solution because life is rarely as simple as the platitudes we want to boil everything down to. Not to mention, when we toss out platitudes and clichés, our suffering friends are rarely helped. Rather, they feel discounted.

Life happens to all of us. Sometimes we need the comforting, sometimes we need to comfort. May we learn better and better ways to comfort and support.

—Edwin L. Crozier